CONFIRMATION

B.P Mc ILVAINE

A

WORD IN SEASON

TO

CANDIDATES FOR CONFIRMATION;

BY

CHARLES PETTIT M'ILVAINE, D. D.
BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF OHIO.

PHILADELPHIA:
DANIELS & SMITH.
1852.

COLLINS, PRINTERS,

A WORD IN SEASON

TO

CANDIDATES FOR CONFIRMATION.

When a serious minded person has it in contemplation to offer himself to his Pastor, as a candidate for the Rite of Confirmation, or Laying on of Hands, as practised in the Protestant Episcopal Church, there are three points on which he may feel his need of instruction; namely, the *Apostolical Origin* of Confirmation; its *Nature and Spiritual Signification*, and the *Qualifications* of a worthy Receiver thereof.

On these three points, in the order in which they are here stated, the author

proposes now to write. And he will do so, as if he had before him a company of persons desirous of instruction with a view to the presenting themselves for admission to the ordinance in view. The first thing to be attended to is—,

I. The Apostolical Origin of Confirmation.

For the better understanding of what will be said on this head, observe that the ordinance is called, in our Prayer Book, by two names. The service for its administration has this title. — viz: "The Order of *Confirmation*, or *Laying on of Hands* upon those who are baptized," &c. The more modern name of the two is *Confirmation*, which comes from the ordinance, being, on the part of the recipient, a ratification

or confirmation of his baptismal vows; and from its being also accompanied with prayer, on the part of the administrator, for the increase of the Holy Spirit, to confirm and strengthen the person confirmed in all grace, until he attain eternal life in heaven. But the earliest name, and that under which we read of it in the Scriptures, is "*the laying on of hands;*" a name taken from the outward gesture by which the administrator, who lays his hands on each recipient, with solemn prayer, indicates that the latter is solemnly consecrated, or set apart, to the service of God, and that for him, individually, the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost are prayed for by the Church. With this introduction, let us see how this *laying on of hands* originated.

Until that storm of persecution, under which Stephen was the first Martyr, had burst upon the Church of Christ, the Apostles had, since the Ascension of the Lord, confined their ministry to Jerusalem and its vicinity. No messenger of the gospel seems to have gone from that metropolis of Christianity, to carry the terms of salvation to any village in Judea or Samaria. But now that Saul made havoc of the Church, and the Christian disciples "were all scattered abroad, except the Apostles;" the heralds of glad tidings "went every where, preaching the word." Among them was Philip, one of the seven Deacons. He "went to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." His word was blessed of God. The Samaritans believed, and "*were*

baptized, both men and women." When the Apostles, at Jerusalem, had heard of this, they sent two of their own number, Peter and John, to confirm and carry on the work which Philip had so auspiciously commenced; who, when they had reached Samaria, and had prayed for the baptized believers, "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost."

In this historical notice, taken from the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we learn, that in the very beginning of the propagation of the Gospel, by the Apostles, they *layed their hands on those who had previously been baptized.*

We find another instance of the same thing in the 19th chapter of the Acts, where it is written that when Paul

came to Ephesus, he found certain disciples to whom he said, "have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" These disciples had received no baptism but that of John the Baptist. On hearing Paul speak of Christ, (it is written,) "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." And what followed their baptism? The laying on of hands. The next verse says, "And *when Paul had laid his hands upon them*, the Holy Ghost came on them," &c.

Were these passages unattended by any subsequent portion of Scripture, to indicate that the "laying on of hands" upon the baptized was intended to be practised generally in the Church, in subsequent, as well as Apostolic times, nothing very material perhaps could be

inferred from them in regard to the duty of the Universal Church.

But we are not left without a more decisive evidence of the station occupied by it in the primitive Church, nor of that which it was intended to hold in all succeeding times.

In the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, first and second verses, we have an enumeration of what St. Paul called "*the principles of the doctrine of Christ.*" Among these, is the rite we are speaking of. The passage is thus: "Therefore leaving the *principles of the doctrine of Christ*, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and *laying on of hands*, and of resurrection of the

dead, and of eternal judgment." Now what St. Paul here calls "principles of the doctrine of Christ," are in the preceeding chapter, called "the first principles of the oracles of God;"—those parts in which men were usually and properly first instructed;—the rudiments of Christianity, as the letters of the alphabet are the elements of reading. But among these rudiments, we find not only *repentance, and faith, and the resurrection, and the judgment,* but we find *baptisms*, also, and the *laying on of hands.*

But what was that "laying on of hands," of which the Apostle so emphatically speaks? Could he have referred to that practised in the ordination of ministers? Certainly not; for ordination being confined to a small portion of

the Church, could not be ranked with baptism and repentance, &c., as a *first principle* of the doctrine of Christ. For the same reason, could he not have referred to the imposition of hands then used in the healing of the sick. But these are the only applications of that outward sign recorded in the New Testament, as connected with the ministry of the Apostles, except that of which we are speaking—the "laying on of hands," as spoken of in the historical passages before quoted. We have therefore, no alternative, unless we suppose the passage in Hebrews to be unintelligible, but to conclude that it was that to which the Apostle there referred. Now let it be distinctly observed that the laying on of hands is here called a "first principle," or, a rudiment of, the

doctrine of Christ; that it is placed in company with an ordinance and with doctrines so elementary, so universal, so certainly intended for all places and all ages of the Church, as Baptism, Repentance, Faith, &c.; that in the order in which these are mentioned, repentance and faith precede baptism, as its essential preparation, and baptism precedes the "laying on of hands," as if the latter were then, as it is now, the supplement of the former; that in this Apostolic enumeration, not a word is said to indicate that any difference was intended, in point of permanence and universality in the Church, between baptism and the laying on of hands, but both are spoken of as alike elementary, and are ranked alike with doctrines which we are sure must continue as

long as the sun and moon endure. What can be more satisfactory evidence that "the laying on of hands" was intended, like baptism, for the Church in all ages, and among all people?

It is of no force to object, that in the case of the Samaritan converts, this imposition of hands was accompanied by the conferring of the "miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost." For even supposing that *all* those converts received those gifts, of which there is no assurance, yet as such gifts were not intended for all times and all Christians, the "laying on of hands" as a "*principle*" or elementary part "of the doctrine of Christ" could not have been inseparable from them; but must have been intended, just as much as repentance, and

faith, and baptism, to be continued without them.

Again. We have no reason to suppose that miraculous gifts were a more universal accompaniment of the imposition of hands upon Christians generally, than they were of the same outward gesture when used in ordaining to the ministry. But we have not ceased to imitate the apostolic practice of the laying on of hands, with prayer for the Holy Ghost, when persons are set apart for the ministry, because we cannot, like the Apostles, confer the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. And we see not why, in the same circumstances, we should not as well continue to follow their example in reference to Christians in general, and thus when sinners profess "repentance from dead works,"

and "faith towards God," and have obeyed "the doctrine of Baptisms," confer upon them that which is next in the Apostle's Catalogue of "principles of the doctrine of Christ," "*the laying on of hands*," with solemn prayer that they "may increase in the Holy Spirit more and more," and so be prepared for the two last of those principles, "resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."

As to how the above passages of scripture should be applied, we have the undivided testimony of the earliest centuries of the church. The earliest writers refer to the narrative concerning the Samaritan converts as one of the grounds on which the rite was observed in their days;—they uniformly ascribe the origin of Confirmation to

the Apostles, declaring that it was practised, in subsequent times, because of apostolic example, and because the church believed that the Apostles expected it to be an ordinance of the church for all times and places. We might as well doubt whether the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's supper were practised in the church during the earliest centuries, as whether the rite of laying on of hands upon the baptized was in universal use. The same books, the same legislation, the same councils, that speak of either, speak of all—and of all, as alike notorious and universal. Tertullian, in the 2d century, speaks of it as universally practised in his time. "Hands (he says) were laid upon them, (baptized persons,) by benediction, calling for,

and invoking, the Holy Ghost." Cyprian, in the third century, speaking of the laying on of hands by the Apostles, upon the converts whom Philip baptized in Samaria, adds: "*Which is still practised among us.*" Jerome, of the fourth century, speaking of the rite, says: "Dost thou ask me where this is written? In the Acts of the Apostles. But if there were no authority of scripture, at all, for it, *the consent of the whole world*, to this point, might well challenge the force of a precept." Again, the same Father, says: "The Bishop is to impose his hands on those who are baptized by Presbyters and Deacons, for the invocation of the Holy Spirit." Another Father of the same century, Augustine, says: "We acknowledge imposition of

hands with prayer, that they which are so taught might receive strength of God's Spirit, so to continue." It is impossible to suppose that this rite could have been at so early a period, universal among Christians, and traced without a question, to the example and sanction of the Apostles, had it not been of such high origin, and intended originally to be thus perpetuated in the church.—Perpetuated it was without exception, until the sixteenth century. Confounded, then, with the corruptions with which it had been encumbered under the deforming hand of Popery, some leaders of the Reformation despairing of a separation between the primitive institution and its modern abuses, abandoned both together.

The Lutheran Churches were among

those which did not lay aside Confirmation, in cleansing Christianity from Popery. The Presbyterian Church of Geneva was among those which did. But that, in doing so, the primitive origin of the ordinance and its spiritual value, when preserved in its native simplicity, were not denied or questioned by the great Reformer of that Church, is manifest from his writings. In the 4th Book of his Institutes, under the head of Confirmation, Calvin says: "It was an ancient custom in the church for the children of Christians, after they were come to years of discretion, to be presented to the bishop in order to fulfil that duty which was required of adults who offered themselves to baptism. For such persons were placed among the catechumens,

till being duly instructed in the mysteries of Christianity, they were enabled to make a confession of their faith before the bishop and all the people. Therefore those who had been baptized in their infancy, because they had not then made such a confession of faith before the church, at the close of childhood, or the commencement of adolescence, were again presented by their parents, and were examined by the bishop. That this exercise, which deserved to be regarded as sacred and solemn, might have the greater dignity and reverence, they also practised the ceremony of *imposition of hands*. Thus the youth, after having given satisfaction concerning his faith, was dismissed with a solemn benediction. This custom is frequently mentioned by the an-

cient writers. Such imposition of hands, as is simply connected with benediction, *I highly approve and wish it were now restored to its primitive use, uncorrupted by superstition.* Succeeding times have almost obliterated the ancient practice, and introduced, I know not what counterfeit confirmation as a sacrament of God." Then after showing with what superstitions and errors Popery had deformed the original institution, he says, "It was the Lord's will that those visible and wonderful graces of the Holy Spirit which he then poured out on his people, should be administered and distributed by his Apostles with imposition of hands. Now I do not conceive that the imposition of hands concealed any higher mystery, but am of opinion that this ceremony

was employed by them, as an external expression of their commending, and as it were, presenting to God, the person upon whom they laid their hands" —"I sincerely wish that we retained the custom which I have stated was practised among the ancients, before this abortive image of a sacrament made its appearance. For it was not such a confirmation as the Romanists pretend," &c.—*Institutes*, b. iv. §§ 4, 5, 6 and 13.

It is one of the instances of that eminent wisdom with which the Church of England conducted her reformation from the corruptions of the pap cy, that this ordinance, instead of being renounced because grievously corrupted, was cleansed, reformed, and retained, because, though defiled and cor-

rupted, it was still Apostolic. As she retained the Scriptures, though found at the reformation almost buried under the traditions of men, and joined, as of only equal authority, with the apocryphal books; as she retained Episcopacy, though it had been crushed under the usurpations of the Pope's supremacy; and the Liturgy, though it had been mingled in all directions with idolatrous services to the Virgin, and Saints, and Angels; not thinking that the pure gold was any the less to be valued and kept, because it had been associated with 'wood, hay, and stubble;' so did she retain *the laying on of hands*, as derived from the Apostles and intended for the Church in all ages.

In this connection, we may ask the attention of the reader to the following

extract from a valuable Report made in years past, to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, by a committee appointed to report on the best method of treating those who had been baptized. The document is valuable as a just exposition of the relations between the church and baptized children, as well as for its testimony on our present subject.

"The Primitive Church considered herself as the common mother of all baptized children, and exercised a corresponding care over them, that they might be trained up as a generation to serve the Lord. She did not indeed, in so many words, in her public confessions, adopted and enlarged from time to time to meet prevailing errors, avow

the principle: nor was it necessary, for the principle was recognized in the requirement of 'a promise or vow from the baptized person, that he would live according to the rules of Christanity.' As this vow could not be made by infants, it was required from those who presented them. These persons, whether parents or others, besides receiving themselves, as members of the church, the seal of baptism, become responsible not only for the instruction, but for the admonition and rebuke, if necessary, of the children baptized. Individuals of eminence in the Primitive Church, incidentally avow the principle, and draw conclusions from it suitable to the circumstances which led them to avow the principle. Thus Agustine says, 'children were presented to baptism, not so

much by those in whose hands they were brought, (though by them too if they were good faithful men,) as by the whole society of saints. The whole Church was their mother.' Hence he concludes the Church is bound to maintain baptized children, who in the course of Providence should be deprived of support. That this principle was in fact avowed by the Primitive Church in her practice, though not in words in her confession, appears from the design of the rite of Confirmation; the attention which was paid to the instruction of baptized children; and the discipline actually inflicted upon them in case of improper conduct.

"It appears that a rite, called Confirmation, was administered by the imposition of the hand of the Minister,

or Bishop, or Elder, together with prayer, on baptized children at a certain age. Both Calvin and Owen acknowledged that this practice existed at a very early period in the Church. The latter thus states its design; 'When they, (that is, the children of believers, baptized in their infancy) were established in the knowledge of these necessary truths, (of which he makes mention before,) and had resolved on personal obedience unto the Gospel, they were offered unto the fellowship of the faithful: and here, on giving the same account of their faith and repentance which others had done before, they were baptized, they were admitted into the communion of the Church; the elders thereof laying their hands on them, in token of their acceptation, and

praying for their confirmation in the faith.' This rite, which originally was confined to those who were baptized in their infancy, was afterwards administered to adults, immediately upon their baptism. In process of time, when the Church became grossly corrupted in her practice as well as doctrine, it was administered to infants immediately after baptism, that they might receive the Lord's supper.—This historical fact, while it exhibits a most deplorable superstition, strikingly illustrates the design of Confirmation, as already stated from Dr. Owen. By this rite, 'it came to pass, saith the judicious Hooker, that children in expectation thereof were seasoned with the principles of true religion, before malice and corrupt examples depraved their minds; a good

foundation was laid betimes for direction of the course of their whole lives: the seed of the Church of God was preserved sincere and sound: the prelates and fathers of God's family, to whom the care of their souls belonged, saw by trial and examination of them, a part of their own heavy burthen discharged; reaped comfort by beholding the first beginnings of true godliness in their tender years, glorified Him whose praise they found in the mouth of infants; and neglected not so fit an opportunity of giving every one fatherly encouragement and exhortation: *whereunto imposition of hands, and prayer being added*, our warrant for the great good effect thereof, is the same which Patriarchs, Prophets, Priests, Apostles, Fathers, and men of God have had, for

such their particular invocations and benedictions as no man, I suppose, professing truth and religion, will easily think to have been without fruit.' This rite of Confirmation, thus administered to baptized children, when arrived at competent years, and previously instructed and prepared for it, with the express view of their admission to the Lord's supper, shows clearly that the Primitive Church in her purest days, exercised the authority of a mother over her baptized children."

II. Let us next consider *the nature and spiritual signification of this ordinance.*

It is the ordinance preparatory to the admission of a baptized person to the full communion of the Church, in the Lord's supper. It is the mode used in our church, by which those who desire

to partake of the Lord's supper, first publicly profess their faith in Christ, with their cordial consecration of themselves to his will; and upon which they are admitted to, and expected to partake in, the highest act of the outward and visible communion of the house of God. All the older and better regulated denominations of Protestant Christians have felt the need of, and have, with more or less constancy, practised, some public ceremony preparatory to admission of the baptized to the Lord's supper, by which their spiritual preparation and faith might be examined into and professed before the congregation. Confirmation is the mode practised among us, in preference to any other way—and we think it no little evidence of its being the best way, that it is

derived from, the usage of the Apostles and the uninterrupted usage of the Church from their times.

In Confirmation, should you come thereto, you will publicly profess and declare that you heartily consent to the vows undertaken, in your name, at your baptism; that you acknowledge yourselves under entire obligation to keep them, and that you do devote yourselves, solemnly and sincerely, to that life of holy obedience to which they bind you. What you will do in receiving confirmation, is precisely the same in point of self-consecration to God, as what an adult person does in receiving baptism, with this single exception, that in confirmation, vows previously made are *renewed* and *ratified*, while in adult baptism they are for the first time

made and professed. But as to the seriousness and solemnity of the engagements and professions involved in the two cases, there is no difference. Read, there, in your prayer book, what an adult promises and professes when baptized; and you will see what you are to do when confirmed. He professes not merely that he *will*, but that he *does renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so as by God's help, not to follow nor be led by them.* This is evidently a positive abandonment of all that is offensive to God. It includes every department, every source, every form of sin. Whatever is included in conformity to the world, in being of the world, or in liv-

ing unto yourselves, is unquestionably embraced. Nothing offensive to God, or injurious to the soul, is excepted. It is as perfect and exalted a profession of a determination to forsake all sin and to live above the world, and to deny self and cultivate a spiritual and heavenly mind, as any communicant at the Lord's table is ever called to make. But further: The adult, in his baptism, besides professing his belief in the doctrines of Christianity, as expressed in the Apostles' creed, promises, by the help of God, *obediently to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life.* This covers the whole ground of active, earnest, devoted piety. It is a solemn promise and profession of devoting himself to all that belongs to the life of a

Christian—the whole spirit, and walk, and conversation of a faithful servant of God. It embraces all that is strict and holy and heavenly-minded in the ways of a devoted follower of Christ, who lives as a pilgrim and stranger on earth, and sets his affections on things above.

Such are the serious and thorough terms of the profession you will make before God and his Church, when, to the question of the Bishop, in the Confirmation service, you shall answer in those two short words, "I do." This answer is easily uttered, but how much does it mean! 'I do henceforth renounce the love and service of the world—I will not follow it—its covetous desires shall not lead me, nor will I seek my pleasure in its pomp and vanities.

I will live above it, and set my affections on things in heaven. Whatever is sinful I renounce; whatever is duty I embrace. To all the will of God, as revealed in the Bible, I devote myself. Does he command me to be holy, to be humble, to walk in love, to live by faith, to be spiritually minded, to improve my talents for his service, to endeavor to do good to my fellow creatures, to glorify him with my body and spirit, and to take the Holy Scriptures as the rule by which my mind and heart and all my life are to be guided, and by which every question of faith and duty is to be determined—the book which I am to search and follow as the lamp of my feet and the light of my path? To this reasonable service I do publicly profess, in reliance on his grace,

to consecrate myself for the remainder of my life.'

Thus you perceive that Confirmation is not a mere ceremony, to which one may come without any reference to the question whether he has given his heart and life to Christ. You see that it is nothing less than a public profession of personal religion. It is a solemn avowal before God and the Church, that henceforth, by His grace, you will live no longer unto yourselves, but unto him that died for you. Hence the strong language in which the profession, undertaken in baptism and renewed in confirmation, is expressed in the baptismal service. "Baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and be made like unto him, that

as he died and rose again for us; so should we, who are baptized, die from sin and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."

The candidate for confirmation should well consider the full meaning and extent of what under the above exposition, he will be expected to declare and profess. And as there is too often manifested a sad looseness of construction and of practice on the part of those who have been confirmed, as to worldly conformity, a few more words on that point will not be out of place.

If the writer be asked, whether, in his view, among "*the pomps and vanities of this wicked world*," which are renounced in baptism, are included

theatrical amusements and dances ; he answers without hesitation, in the affirmative. If he be asked whether, under the Apostle's exhortation, "*be not conformed to the world,*" they are, in his view, included as matters of worldly conformity to be forsaken ; he answers, certainly. If he be asked whether those things are consistent with the cultivation of a spiritual mind, and the maintaining of a rightful Christian influence, by example, for the good of man and the glory of God ; he must answer, they are, in his view, *very inconsistent* with such duties. He thinks they are renounced in baptism ; that their renunciation is ratified in confirmation, and professed in every participation of the Lord's Supper. He prays the time may come when all

communicants will unite in rejecting these things; and he trusts that all who come to be confirmed, under his hands, will consider themselves as solemnly separated from them. The question, in his view, is very simple. It is not, as it is often, delusively, put, what is the harm of dancing or of dramatic representations, and the like, under any conceivable simplicity and abstraction, which because it would present no inducement to a worldly taste, would never be customary; but it is, what is their inconsistency with the spirit, example, profession, and whole spiritual walk of a Christian, when they are contemplated in the condition, and surrounded by all the associations, in which the world always has had, and always will have, them. We must

take them as they are, and are to be. We must look at them as to the state of mind they engender; the time they waste; the expenses they involve; the obstacles they place to the saving influence of the word and ordinances of God; the difficulties they make for a pious parent endeavoring to train his children, according to their baptism, in the nurture of the Lord; and the offence which they certainly are to the great mass of serious, earnest, Christian people. We feel well assured that these things are "*of the world*," while true Christians are not. When professing Christians, as a community, are in the habit of these things, spiritual, earnest, active piety cannot flourish, formality must prvail, and the world will mould

the church much more than the church will sanctify the world.*

Here it is proper to say that our

---

* In the year 1817, these things came before the General Convention of our church, and the House of Bishops entered on their journal the following : " The House of Bishops, solicitous for the preservation of the purity of the Church, and the piety of its members, are induced to press on the clergy the important duty, with a discreet but earnest zeal, of warning the people of their respective cures of the danger of an induldgence in those worldly pleasures which may tend to withdraw their affections from spiritual things. And especially on the subject of theatrical amusements, to which some peculiar circumstances have called their attention, they do not hesitate to express their unanimous opinion, that these amusements, as well from their licentious tendency, as from the strong temptations to vice which they afford, ought not to be frequented."

Church is very far from regarding Confirmation as possessing the dignity and authority of a *sacrament;* which, as you have learned, from the Catechism of the Church, must necessarily consist of two parts:—1st. "*an outward and visible sign:*" and 2d. "*an outward and spiritual grace given unto us,*" and which that sign signifies and pledges. These are truly found in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But, in Confirmation, though there is, on the part of the Bishop, the outward sign of the *laying on of hands*, it is not intended to signify any grace residing in, or communicated or promised to, the person confirmed. It is only a gesture indicating that he is set apart for God, and made a special subject of prayer.

Again, it is required by the definition of a sacrament, above referred to, that

it be "*ordained by Christ himself.*" Thus were Baptism and the Lord's supper most emphatically ordained. They are necessary to the integrity of the Christian Church. A church as a visible society cannot exist without them. But not so with Confirmation. The highest authority claimed for this rite is the *example of the Apostles*—as in the prayer next to the Lord's Prayer, in the 'Order of Confirmation,' where the administrator says, "We make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants, on whom, *after the example of thy holy Apostles*, we have now laid our hands." This indeed is very high and sacred authority, demanding a very reverent and obedient homage. And therefore did the Church for more than 1500 years after the Apostles, without any

controversy or exception, practise this rite. And therefore do all Episcopal Churches and many others continue its practice. But still we do not regard it as having been ordained in the same positive and authoritative manner as Baptism, and the Lord's supper. In point of dignity and importance, we most carefully distinguish it from those two institutions which the Lord himself so imperatively appointed as the great seals of his Church and people to the end of the world.

Now, my dear friends, should you come to be confirmed, the usefulness of this ordinance to you, will depend entirely on *the state of mind* in which you shall receive it. It is no charm which is to do you good, whatever your qualifications for its reception. The Bishop,

administering, cannot convey to your souls any spiritual blessing. He can only pray for you. It is therefore exceedingly important that you will understand and consider what is necessary to qualify you for the worthy receiving of this ordinance. We proceed therefore, to our third subject of enquiry, viz :

III. *The Qualifications for Confirmation.*

These, as laid down by the Church, are of two general kinds, *intellectual* and *spiritual;* qualifications as to *knowledge of religious truth*, and as to *dispositions and determination to religious duty.*

Let us first consider the *knowledge* required. Read the opening address of the Confirmation service, and you will see what the Church declares on

this head. In that summary is included the knowledge of the creed, the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments and the catechism of the Church. To these, of course, must be added a knowledge of the vows of baptism, which by the candidate are to be ratified and confirmed. It can hardly be conceived by the feeblest mind that merely to be able to *say* these formularies of religious knowledge is enough. They evidently embrace a comprehensive view of Christian doctrine and duty, of the way of salvation and of the privileges, responsibilities and whole character of a follower of Christ; and as such, it is therefore the expectation of the Church that, besides being learned by memory, they shall be understood in their meaning and solemn obligation. The amount

of knowledge required is placed at this low and simple mark; not by any means because it is not extremely important that all Christians should go on to increase in religious knowledge, to the utmost of their abilities and opportunities; but it was necessary thus to place it, lest any of the young and the poor and the weak-minded, and those of small opportunities of knowledge, who nevertheless know enough to follow Christ, and who do truly follow him, should be excluded from the communion of his Church. But *knowledge* is a small part of the qualifications required for Confirmation. There is a *preparationf o the heart*, as well as *the ansuer of the tongue*. What is that preparation? In other words:

What are the *spiritual qualifications*?

These are not expressed in that address of the Confirmation office, which speaks so plainly of what "the Church hath thought good to order," in regard to the knowledge required. And hence not a few have taken up the singular idea that what is specified in that address is the whole qualification of any kind demanded, as well spiritual, as intellectual. But did the Church mean to teach that when a person comes to renew and solemnly ratify and profess the vows of his baptism, his only required qualification is a knowledge of the nature and meaning of those vows, without any serious purpose, disposition and determination, by the help of God, and the use of all the means of grace to comply with them; that when he confirms his renunciation of the world

and of all sin, it shall not be required of him that he have the heart and desire, and resolution actually to renounce them; that when he ratifies his solemn engagements to keep the word of God to his life's end, it shall not be one part of his qualification that his affections be set upon that will, and his life be really consecrated thereto? The church could not possibly be guilty of such an absurdity.

The Church has not detailed the *spiritual* requisites for Confirmation, in the service for that rite, as she has the *intellectual;* because she has so particularly expressed them elsewhere, and in those very formularies which the required knowledge embraces. For example, in the catechism, it is asked "*What is required of persons to be*

baptized?" This question, of course, is just as applicable to persons to be confirmed; since the vows *assumed* in baptism are the vows *ratified* in Confirmation. And what is the answer of the Church to that question? "*Repentance* whereby they forsake sin; and *faith* whereby they steadfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament;" that is, faith whereby they embrace all the promises of sanctification and justification through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Again, it is asked in the catechism, "*What is required of those who come to the Lord's Supper?*" And this question is quite as applicable to those who come to be *Confirmed*, since Confirmation is the introductory rite to the Lord's Supper, and he who has received the

former is considered as having been admitted by the highest human ministry of the Church to the latter, and as having a right, and as being bound by the vows renewed in Confirmation, to come thereto, unless something of a disqualifying nature has occurred since he was confirmed. Thus, then, in the answer to the question of the catechism, as to the qualifications for the Lord's Supper, as well as in what is said concerning baptism, the Church defines the spiritual preparation for those who should be Confirmed. And what is that answer? "To examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins; steadfastly purposing to lead a new life; having a lively faith in God's mercy, through Christ, with a

thankful remembrance of his death; and be in charity with all men."

Now it is evident that what is here said of preparation for the Lord's Supper is but the repetition, with a little more detail, of what is previously said of preparation for Baptism. For each sacrament, the great constituents of all spiritual qualification are *Repentance* for sin, for *all* sin of which we are guilty in thought, word, or deed; repentance of so sincere and hearty a nature that it causes *the forsaking of all sin* and *the steadfast purpose to lead a new life;* and then *Faith*, embracing all the promises of the Gospel as all our hope—"a *lively* faith," not the mere faith of the understanding, but the living and active faith of the heart, which trusts only "*in God's mercy thrugh Christ*," as all the

sinner's dependance for salvation—a faith which so worketh by love that it brings forth the fruit of a "*a thankful remembrance of Christ's death*," and a life of "*charity with all men*."

Such are the qualifications for that rite which ratifies and confirms the vows of Baptism and opens the door to the communion of the Lord's Supper. But they are more at large expressed in the service of adult Baptism. There,—in the conculding address to the person baptized, you will see that he is exhorted as one who has by his baptism professed to be "a child of God and of the light, by faith in Jesus Christ." The nature of his profession, as represented in his Baptism, "is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died,

and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized, die from sin and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." Unquestionably none who have come to years of discretion should be admitted to baptism, except they do seriously hope, after serious self-examination, that they can sincerely and heartily enter upon that profession, and come to that sacrament, repenting and believing with a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; renouncing the world, with all its pomps and vanities, and consecrating themselves unreservedly to the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, and this unquestionably is equally true of confirmation.

Turn to the service of the Commu-

nion, and you will see the same in a somewhat different aspect. There the Minister is standing at the Table of the Lord. Before he begins the preparation of the feast, he publishes the invitation,—but before the invitation, —the terms—namely, that they "*come in the marriage garment required by God in Holy Scripture.*" The benefit is great indeed, but only to those who come "with a true penitent heart and lively faith." He therefore pronounces the only terms: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near," &c.

But since confirmation is the door to

the communion ; since the personal ratification of our baptismal vows, "*in spirit and in truth*," gives a title of admission, or rather does admit, to the communion of the church, these solemn words at the table of the Lord should be considered as addressed to every candidate for confirmation, affectionately inviting and bidding those to come who do humbly believe they have a true penitent heart and living faith, and do heartily desire and determine, by the grace of God, to live as becometh the Gospel ; but with equal decision fencing up the rite from the approach of all who have no reason to believe that they have thus embraced the promises.

If you will now peruse the service for Confirmation you will see an entire ratification of all the views above expressed.

Every part of that service proceeds upon the supposition that the candidates have come in the spirit of which we have been speaking, and consider themselves as making the solemn profession before God and man, which we have described. They are regarded not as merely *desiring to become* the followers of Christ; not as having only a serious consideration of religion, and a serious disposition towards its duties, which they may hope will be strengthened and carried on by attendance on this and all other ordinances of the church, till they ripen at last into positive piety and an actual reconciliation with God. This indeed, it is to be feared, is the footing on which not a few contemplate a participation in this rite, as well as in the sacraments of the church. They rightly

regard these ordinances as *means of grace;* but they forget that they are means for the *confirmation*, not for the first *implantation*, of grace. They are means of grace indeed, and most eminently adapted for the strengthening and furthering in our hearts of repentance and faith; but it is required that before we come to them, we be already in the exercise, at least in some infant degree, of "a true penitent heart and lively faith." So that merely to have a serious mind in regard to these things, and a general desire to obtain them, and a hope, through such ordinances, to possess them, by and by, is far from the state of mind and heart required. You will see by a perusal of the confirmation service, that those who come thereto are regarded, not as *intending*

to enter upon the Christian life, *but as having done so already.* In the prayer offered up by the bishop in their behalf, just before the laying on of hands, they are spoken of as being now *regenerated by the Holy Ghost*, and as having already received *the forgiveness of all their sins.* And in the solemn supplication which accompanies the imposition of hands, the petition is not that they may *become*, but that they may *continue to be* the servants of God; not that they may *receive*, but daily *increase* in, the Holy Spirit more and more.

From all that has now been said, you perceive, my dear friends, how grievously they are mistaken who suppose that any who do not conscientiously hope they have given their hearts and lives to Christ, should come to confirmation.

You see that he who comes to the Lord's Supper, is bound by no obligations, makes no professions, assumes no responsibilities, which do not equally rest upon him who has been confirmed. Then let me ask you this question. Should any one approach to confirmation, who does not feel himself prepared for the communion? If he shrink from the solemnity and responsibility of the latter, has he not quite as much reason to shrink from the solemnity and responsibility of the former? Unquestionably, whoever is prepared to ratify his baptismal vows, in the one, is prepared to do it, and is bound to do it in the other. He who repents, and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, with a true and living faith, is prepared for both; as evidently as that

he who does not, is prepared for neither. So that none should be admitted to confirmation but those who will expect to proceed from thence, on the earliest opportunity, to the commemoration of the death of Christ in the holy Eucharist. Said Bishop Burnet: "Till one is of an age and disposition fit to receive the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and desires to be confirmed as a solemn preparation and qualification for it, he is not ready" for confirmation. —*Pastoral Care*, 190.

In requiring that every candidate for confirmation should become a communicant immediately after his confirmation, as a matter of course, we do not bring down the spiritual qualifications for the Lord's Supper, nor the serious

responsibility of the communicant, to a level with the low views too often entertained as to the proper preparation and responsibility of him who comes to be confirmed, but we elevate the latter to the spiritual rank and importance of the former.

And now, my dear friends, let me intreat you to make very serious and solemn work, in examining your hearts, to ascertain whether you possess the qualifications I have laid before you. The step you contemplate is of great importance. Well taken, with a heart wholly decided to be on the Lord's side, and to keep a plain and broad demarcation between you and all wordly conformity, and all sin, it would be of the greatest benefit in your whole subse-

quent course. Search your hearts, under the eye of God, praying as David did: "Search me, O God, and try me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The following questions will assist you (by the Lord's blessing,) in determining your duty.

1st. *Have you been brought to true repentance?*

In order to answer this question satisfactorily to yourselves, let it be divided into the following particulars:

Do you see yourself to be so sinful as to deserve God's wrath and condemnation? Do you see that your sinfulness lies not merely in particular acts of trangression, but chiefly in your heart; that the heart is the fountain of sin, so that in you naturally dwells no good

thing? Is your heart humbled before God on account of your sinfulness? Do you cordially hate it, and desire to be delivered from all sin? Are your affections set upon God and upon holiness? Are you heartily striving to be more and more free from sin, and to be transformed more and more into the mind of Christ and conformity to his will?

2d. *Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?*

Consider this question by dividing it into the following:

Have you been brought to renounce all reliance on your own works and righteousness for acceptance with God? Do you place any reliance for mercy upon your reformation, your prayers, your religious efforts, your attention to

religious duties, or any actions or feelings of your own? Or do you feel that all your help and hope are to be sought in Christ? Have you fled to him and committed your soul to him as all your refuge and righteousness? Do you feel that he is precious to your soul; and do you desire and determine to live wholly unto him?

3rd. *Are you willing and resolved to follow Christ, whatever it may cost you?*

Are you prepared to give up all vain amusements—all sinful conformity to the world; whatever is opposed to the maintenance of a spiritual frame of mind, and a holy walk and conversation?

4th. Are you resolved to endeavor conscientiously to perform your whole duty to God and your fellow creatures? Is it your solemn determination to make

the will of God, as revealed in his word, the rule and guide of your spirit and life, all your days?

5th. Do you earnestly desire to glorify God, and to honor his service by an example becoming the Gospel? Do you realize the great responsibility of that public profession of religion which you contemplate; and will it be your earnest prayer and effort to live consistently with what the world has reason to look for in a Christian?

6th. Do you lean to your own wisdom or strength for ability to live as above described? Or do you feel that your own strength is perfect weakness —that your sufficiency is only of God? Will you look to Him for all your strength, and yet strive to follow Christ

in the diligent use of all means of growth in grace?

7th. Do you find habitual pleasure and profit in secret prayer and in reading the Scriptures? Do you heartily love these duties? Do you feel the absolute necessity of their frequent and regular observance to all steadfastness in your religious walk, and all prosperity in your soul? Will you make it a matter of conscientious observance, daily to read the Scriptures in a devout manner, and daily to wait upon God in *secret* and earnest prayer?

If you are able, conscientiously to answer in the affirmative, to these questions, you may trust that you know by experience what it is to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and may lay aside all hesitation as to the

propriety of your coming to the ordinance in prospect, Indeed, if such be your state, I bid you, in the name of the Lord, *come*. You can sincerely profess, and consent to, all that is involved in such an act. You will find it to be a grateful, as well as very solemn, opportunity of confessing Christ; of writing anew upon your hearts, the vows of God which are already upon you, and of seeking, under the special prayer of the Church, as well as by your own earnest supplications, the confirmation of the Spirit of God to seal you "unto the day of redemption." Approaching in the spirit of true humility and earnest hungering after righteousness, you may hope to receive, in *the laying on of hands*, by the human ministry, that blessing which no hand but

that of "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls," can bestow, even "joy and peace in believing." Your sense of responsibility, as Christians and stewards of God, will be increased; your faith, as weak and unworthy sinners, leaning upon the strength and righteousness of Christ, will be invigorated; your hope of the prize of your high calling will be rendered more effectual to enable you to run with patience the race that is set before you."

But here it is important to remind you that in examining yourselves by these or similar questions, it is the *reality*, not the *degree* of attainment in spiritual things, by which you are to judge of your fitness for the ordinance in view. Tender consciences are not unfrequently much troubled for the want

of this distinction. Because they easily ascertain that they are very far from having as deep a repentance, as lively a faith, as fervent a love, and as complete an obedience as they ought to have, and as they suppose Christians generally have; they fear they are too far beneath the will of God to be warranted in coming to the communion of the Lord's Supper, and to that solemn ordinance which is introductory thereto. But who, if this were the true method of ascertaining one's fitness, would not be prevented from approaching? Who *counts himself to have apprehended that for which he is apprehended of Christ Jesus?* Who can say any thing more for himself than that having set out in the race, *he is pressing towards*

the mark of the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Having truly repented, and believed, and loved and obeyed, but having come very far short in all things of that *degree* of penitence and faith and love and obedience which he ought to feel, he is striving for more, and endeavoring daily to grow in grace. True Christians are found of very different degrees of attainment in grace. But their privileges as Christians, in regard to the communion of the Church, are not different. Though some are more *grown* than others, all are *alive* unto God; and therefore all are partakers of the hope of salvation through Christ, and of that communion of his body and blood by which the true hope is strengthened and animated.

But suppose not, my friends, that I would turn your attention entirely away from the degree of your attainment in grace, and from all comparison between your state as Christians and the holy standard by which we are commanded to direct our aim and estimate our progress. This you must indeed do habitually, constantly. It is the way by which to see your unworthiness; to grow in humility and true repentance; to realize more and more your need of the atoning blood of Christ, and to feel the exceeding preciousness of a Saviour, who is mighty to save to the uttermost. It is the way to see and adore the patience and loving kindness of the Lord; to gather food for continual thanksgiving and praise, and incite-

ments to daily diligence in endeavoring to rise more above the world, obtain more victory over the sin that dwelleth in you, and more conformity to the perfect will of God.

But the question *now* is, not whether you have need of *more* repentance and faith and love and obedience and holiness; but whether you have *any*. Not whether you have advanced to a certain measure of *growth* in the divine life, but whether you have been *born* into that life; not how far you have attained *towards the stature of men in Christ Jesus*, but whether you have attained to the condition of "*children* of God and of the light, by faith in Christ Jesus." You may have been born again of the Holy Ghost, and so have begun to live

unto God and to be his "dear children," and yet you may be still in the infancy of grace; having all the features of children of God, the heart, the mind, the will—and yet all in infancy; growing indeed, but not grown; becoming daily more established, but yet very weak, very delicate, and peculiarly dependant upon all the means of grace. The question now is, Have you reason to believe that you have been born of the Spirit and are children of God; that you have and do repent, believe, love, obey and follow after holiness? Be exceedingly honest and impartial with yourselves in determining this question. If you answer "*yes though all is exceeding weak and unworthy;*" Then come. If any *real* Christians should more than

any others partake in ordinances of a sealing, confirming and invigorating character, surely they are those who are most in the beginning of grace.

But here let me touch upon another point of much interest to one in your circumstances. Perhaps the thoughts of your hearts are sometimes such as the following: Though I trust I have been changed in heart, and made, through divine grace, desirous above all things of living for Christ, yet I am so weak; so liable to be led astray; to be overcome by the world, and to lose all spiritual mindedness! And should I make a profession of religion, however sincerely, and then fall away, and live inconsistently with christian duty, what a dreadful thing would it be to my own

soul, and how injurious to the cause of Christ! Now am I not too weak to venture upon such a step, when such may be the consequences?"

The answer is—Must we confess Christ before men, as soon as we are his, or at some indefinite time hereafter? Must the Christian acknowledge God in all his ways; the ways of his spiritual childhood as well as of his riper years; or only in a part of them, *when all his ways are established!* Does the Christian walk by sight and sense, only going forward in duty when he feels that he has strength within himself to trust in; or does he *walk by faith* in this wilderness, not expecting ever to feel strong in himself, but to find strength as he needs it, "*in the Lord and in the power*

of his might ; saying, "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want ; "the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Were you now about to go into the valley and shadow of death, and to enter into conflict with "the last enemy," would you expect to feel strength in your own arm to bring salvation from his onset ; or would you lean exclusively upon the "rod and staff," of Him who hath promised, "I will never leave nor forsake thee ?" But if you will have to meet even death, with nothing to sustain you, but the assurance, "Fear not, I am with thee ;" can you not in the same strength encounter all the responsibilities of a Christian profession ?

It is of the greatest importance that your minds be clear on this subject of *strength and sufficiency.*

Did you feel else than entirely weak and insufficient of yourselves, to live as becometh the gospel, it would be indeed a discouraging sign as to your preparation for the ordinance in view. Not *to feel* weak, is indeed *to be* the weakest of all. You will always feel weak in yourselves, just in proportion as you shall grow in grace and become "*strong in faith.*" The christian's might is never in himself, but always "in the Lord." He stands fast, in proportion as a sense of his own helplessness constrains him to lean upon the guidance and support and protection of his Redeemer. Then does he say of a truth,

"when I am weak, then am I strong." The more he feels his infirmities, the more he will seek help of God, and the more will "the power of Christ rest upon him."

Now, my dear friends, if you ever get rid of a sense of weakness and entire insufficiency for these things, it can only be by getting rid of the knowledge of yourselves, and of a belief of the words of him who said—"without me ye can do nothing." Your own weakness is the very reason why the means of grace have been appointed; and among them, *that* solemn ordinance which we have been particularly considering.

My instruction to you is this. If you have reason to hope that you have given

yourselves to the Lord in true repentance and faith, then you must embrace *all duty*. But under *all duty*, is included the public confession of Christ, and of his truth and service. You might as well stand back from seeking the salvation of your soul, because you have no strength, as, for that reason, to hesitate at making that confession. You have as much ability to honor a Christian profession in all things, as you have to do its duty in any thing. You have in yourselves no ability now to repent and believe, any more than to live always according to godliness; but the Lord who "worketh in you to will and to do according to his good pleasure," and whose grace is sufficient for you, will make you strong for the one

as well as the other. *You must believe in Jesus*, not only for pardon, but for strength; not only to be made at last acceptable to God, but to be enabled now to keep yourselves "unspotted from the world," not only to give you the prize of victory at the end, but to sustain you all the way of the race. He is your sword and shield as well as righteousness; your shepherd as well as your sacrifice. You must believe in him to supply all your wants; to give you the bread of life; to defend you against the fiery serpent of the wilderness; to refresh you when you are weary; to lead you all your journey through. Thus have the Israel of God always been supported and guided and saved. By faith they set out from the house of bondage; by faith, they passed through the waters

and were not overflowed ; by faith, they walked in paths which they knew not of and lost not their way ; by faith, they took of that bread and drank of that rock which followed them, and that bread and rock was Christ ; by faith, they endured every trial as seeing him who is invisible, and who never suffered them to trust his grace in vain ; by faith, they lived as pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and looked for a better country, even an heavenly, till "*all died in faith*," finding the same dividing of the waters at the end of the way, as at its beginning, and never knowing a day when the manna did not feed them, till they had entered "the good land" and did "eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Para-

dise of God." And my friends as long as faith shall lead you to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, not in reliance upon *your working*, but upon God to *work in you*, to will and to do ; so long will Christ be "made unto you, of God, wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Now, have you faith to obey the Lord, and profess his cause and seal your vows to his service, trusting his grace to be sufficient for you ?

Perhaps you find your state of mind to be such as that while you earnestly desire to feel as these pages indicate, you are in great doubt whether your views and feelings answer satisfactorily to the questions proposed for your self-examination. Still, do not at once re-

linquish the idea of coming to this ordinance. Carry your doubts to the throne of grace. Pray earnestly for all that you feel yourselves to need. Diligence at the mercy-seat may remove every hindrance before the day shall arrive. Let your pastor know your doubts. Be free to communicate with him upon the subject of your qualifications. He may encourage, where you would be in fear. You cannot trespass upon his time or patience, when coming on such an errand. That the merciful Lord may guide your self-examination; that he may guard you against every spiritual delusion, every unfounded hope, and all false confidence: that he may enable you to approach the ordinance we have been considering with an

humble and contrite heart; with a living faith and a fervent love; that he may meet and bless you with the confirming influences of his Holy Spirit to "establish, strengthen and settle you" in all that belongs to the Christian character, so that you may be sealed unto the day of redemption, may God, of his infinite mercy, grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord; *Amen.*

THE END.

STEREOTYPED BY
S. DOUGLAS WYETH, AGT.
No. 7 Pear Street. Philad'a.

Date Due

FACULTY

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01004 5955